

Making the **Hours** Count

Transforming Your **Service** Experience

Student Book

Constance Fourré

Saint Mary's Press®



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This book is dedicated to two groups of people. First, to the many in our Church and in our world who give their lives every day in service to those who are marginalized. Their generosity, courage, wisdom, and joy provide light for us all. Second, to the young members of our Church who will someday take their place and be inspired by their example. May these pages help create the bridge between the two.

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Introduction

The Transforming Power of Service

Welcome! You are about to begin a wonderful adventure. You are starting a project that has the potential to change your life forever. Service has helped young people choose a career, strengthen traits like kindness and generosity, and develop skills that can strengthen relationships. Service can bring you fun, laughter, and cherished memories.

You may be a rookie, venturing for the first time into the world of service. Perhaps you are a veteran, returning to a familiar project or tackling something new, expanding your horizons even further. Wherever you are, this book can help. The first four chapters give practical guidance on finding the right spot for you and getting off to the best start possible. Rookies may need this information more than veterans, although every volunteer experience is unique.

Chapters five through nine are quite different. They are designed to help you see service and justice more deeply, to transform your service, and to help it transform you. Getting to know new people and helping them and yourself through service are great opportunities. But there can be more.

Think back to your first days in junior high. You were probably excited, scared, and a little bewildered when you arrived. You knew you were making a new start, entering a new era in your life. But now, as you look back on those days, you realize just how much your life has changed. You did not understand at that time all the dimensions of growing up.

You're older now, and you may have a fair idea of what you're about with this project. But there are dimensions you probably don't yet see. Service isn't just helping people in need. It also has the potential to influence the person you become. Reflecting on your experience and working through some of the information in this book can help you understand the world, your own values, and yourself on a far deeper level. Reflection combined with experience is powerful.

These pages are designed to help you look beyond the faces of the people you will see—important as they are. You will gain insight into the experiences that influence people whose lives are different from yours, and you will discover why some inequalities exist. You will get a chance to reflect on short-term and long-term solutions to issues, and how you can be part of either. You will get guidance and experience in solving problems and handling conflict creatively. You will have a chance to reflect on how being Catholic can help form your ideals and anchor your place in the world.

Athletes determine their performance in the pool or on the field each day in their practice sessions. In the same way, the decisions you make as a young person influence the kind of adult you will become. You get to decide whether you will be an active citizen or someone who just sits back and lets things happen. Thoughtful service can help you discover the path to being a person who makes a difference.

And, through your project, you may receive a smile from someone whose day would have been bleak without your presence; feel the victory of a disabled child who smacks her first baseball; have the satisfaction of seeing a tidy, freshly painted house where before there was peeling paint and a weedy lawn; or provide your city council with new information that prompts them to protect an endangered wetland. Those achievements are priceless.

How to Use This Book

If you are using this book as part of a class, your teacher will direct you through the book. If you are serving on your own, here are a few suggestions.

First, glance over chapters one through four. Find your own starting point and begin working your way through the process of setting up your project and getting started. Look over chapters eight and nine, on analysis and advocacy, before selecting your project.

After you've begun your project, take a look at chapters five through nine. These chapters have a lot of information. It would be hard to read them through in one sitting. A better approach is to read sections over the course of your project, applying them one piece at a time.

You don't need to read these chapters in order. You may want to go back over some sections as your work progresses. The last chapter helps you evaluate your experience and gather wisdom before moving on. If you choose your project wisely and invest yourself in it, you will be amazed at what will fill those pages.

Time to Get Started

As you start your service experience, don't shy away from being daring. As the title of this book states, make the hours count. With an open heart, service is more than meeting a predetermined amount of hours. It has the power to transform the world and you.

Chapter 1

YOU AND YOUR PROJECT

Finding the Right Match

You're ready to begin the process of finding your service project. This chapter will help you examine the hopes, gifts, experience, and concerns you bring to your service work. It will help you begin to narrow down your choices and form a clearer picture of the joys and challenges of the next months.

A service project's success depends a lot on finding the right match. Plenty of great service opportunities are out there, but not all of them would be great for you. By taking some time now to assess your own strengths and interests you increase the chances of having a happier and more successful service experience. You bring a lot to this venture. You have talents and gifts, your own personal style, experience, and curiosity about the world you have yet to discover. You may take some of your talents and skills for granted—or there may be some you have not yet discovered.

The inventories that follow are designed to help you take a look at yourself, your experiences, your preferences, and some of your goals. They can help you identify what you bring to your service work and the areas where you would like to grow. They provide a foundation for the next chapter, when you will decide on the specific service project you will take on.

Your Personal Style

This first inventory takes a look at your personal style. Each person has preferences that influence how he or she behaves in most situations. For example, some people enjoy both working alone and spending time in large groups. Others get bored and restless when they're alone, while still others feel anxious or tired when they're with large groups of people they don't know. Each personality style has its own gifts to contribute. The trick is to match the right personality to the right job, if possible.

Personality Style

Place a check mark in front of the statements that best describe you. It is okay to check two contradictory statements.

- I like to meet new people—the more the better.
- I like to have long-term relationships with a few people.
- I enjoy the challenge of the unexpected.
- I am more comfortable when things are predictable.
- I like to know what's expected of me.
- I like to figure out what needs to be done and do it.
- I'm comfortable telling people what to do.
- I prefer to have someone else in charge.
- I am good at thinking on my feet.
- I enjoy meeting people who are different from myself.
- I am a practical person.
- I enjoy working by myself.
- I like being with small groups of people.
- I'm good at organizing things.
- I would prefer to have one service project and stick with it.
- I would prefer to try a variety of different service projects.
- I'm comfortable being with people who are in pain.
- I do well working under pressure.
- I like to get a project completed.
- I like open-ended projects.
- I like to listen.
- I like to talk.

The People You've Met

Put an X in front of people you've known.

Put an O in front of people you'd be interested in getting to know.

- | X | O | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | elderly people |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | children with mental disabilities |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | children with physical disabilities |

- ___ ___ adults with mental disabilities
- ___ ___ adults with physical disabilities
- ___ ___ people who are sick or injured
- ___ ___ preschoolers
- ___ ___ elementary school-age children
- ___ ___ middle school students
- ___ ___ people who come from another culture
- ___ ___ people who are active in making a difference

Stepping Outside of Your Comfort Zone

Your personal style inventory will help you select a project that is comfortable for you. While feeling at ease is important, stretching your comfort zone is also valuable. For example, a student named Laura was persuaded by a friend to volunteer in a nursing home. Laura had very little experience with elderly people and wasn't sure how they would behave or how she would respond. She was terrified before her first day and made her friend promise not to leave her side.

On that first day Laura discovered she had an exceptional ability to connect with the elderly. She was so thrilled that the following day she raced down the hall to find me and share her good news. Before long she was working with Alzheimer's patients, loving the residents no matter how confused or even angry they became. A staff member told her, "Everybody is somebody's child." Laura learned that this adage applied to everyone, whether they were nine or ninety, and this belief stayed with her long after she left her volunteer position. Laura took a chance that she could get comfortable in a new setting, and it paid off. As you select a project, consider signing up for work that would expand your comfort zone. You may discover new strengths and talents in yourself that would never have emerged if you'd chosen to stay only in familiar territory.

"You are ready for what Christ wants of you now. He wants you—all of you—to be the light of the world, as only young people can be light. It is time to let your light shine!"

(Pope John Paul II,
January 26, 1999)

Your Interests and Skills

You carry your personal style with you wherever you go and in everything you do. You've developed specific interests and skills you can share with someone else. You don't have to be exceptional in any of these areas to be able to share them effectively. The following inventory will help you call to mind abilities you have that could be valuable to someone else. It can also help you see what kind of project you would be interested in choosing.

Place an X in front of your skills and interests.

___ Athletics
Which sports?

___ Music
Which instrument(s)?

Voice

___ Theater
___ Academics
Your best subjects:

Your worst subjects:

___ Politics
___ Recreation
___ The outdoors
___ Animals
___ Your faith
___ Exercise
___ Computers
___ Other

Your Past Experience

You may have experiences outside of school or extracurricular activities that provide you with valuable skills or insight in selecting a project. Take a few minutes to write down any pertinent experience we haven't yet mentioned and to consider what you may have learned from that experience.

I have the following paid or unpaid experience:

(Examples: babysitting, coaching T-ball, teaching Sunday school, working in an office, and so on)

What I have learned about myself from this experience:

(For example: I have patience, I'm not good at taking charge, I can stand up to pressure, and so on.)

Areas in which I'd like to grow:

(Try to pick three areas where you would like to improve.)

Can I Make a Difference?

You may wonder whether the work you are about to do is really important. Sometimes when we look at all the problems in the world we can start to feel hopeless. As you begin your project you may feel overwhelmed. You see children who are abused, or newcomers to our country who have lost their homelands, and you realize hundreds of thousands of people are like them. On some days it seems as though we're trying to empty the ocean with a bucket. In later chapters we will explore the many ways your service project can make a difference in your life and for those you serve.

Myth or Reality?

One definition of *myth* is, “a traditional story of supposedly historical events that serves to unfold part of the world's view of a people or explain a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon.” Although *myth* can have more than one meaning, in this book we will be talking about myths as inaccurate assumptions we may carry into our projects. Reality, on the other hand, is people and situations as they truly exist. Having a realistic view of our experience is being able to see not only circumstances or people's behaviors but also to understand why they occur.

One potential benefit of service for us can be the opportunity to develop a more accurate picture of our world. We develop beliefs and assumptions about people and our world based on the media, what we hear from those around us, and from our experience. Sometimes our beliefs are accurate; often they are biased or just incomplete—in other words, we accept myths because we don't have enough information or experience to judge more correctly.

An assumption is a belief we develop without really checking it out. Unexamined assumptions can limit our ability to experience the world as it really is. For example,

one hundred years ago most people in the United States assumed that women were not as intelligent as men and were very limited physically. Few people challenged that assumption because it never occurred to them there was any other way to think. Most women would not even consider running competitively, for example, because they assumed they did not have the physical stamina to run long distances. Because they exercised so little, if they had tried to run a mile their false assumption would have been confirmed. Women lost opportunities and joys we take for granted today because it did not occur to them or those around them that they could have more.

You may well have inaccurate assumptions about the people you are about to serve and the places you will go. These assumptions are simply the result of lack of experience. In this book we will take a look at assumptions that may get in your way or the way of people around you. These assumptions may affect how you treat certain people, how you vote, where you choose to live, and the people you allow into your life. Discovering that some of our beliefs are incorrect can help us become a little more open and curious as we go into new situations. In the future you may be able to share what you have learned with other people who have not had your opportunities.

How Christian Service Is Different

Public schools across the country have developed strong programs that give millions of students a chance to serve. But this program is different. You are taking on this project as a member of a parish or as a student at a Catholic school. Your program has a faith dimension that is not necessarily a part of other people's service efforts, no matter how generous they may be.

In a later chapter we will talk about Catholic social teaching, the Church's Tradition on how we should handle ourselves in a complex, interrelated world. For now, we will talk about what it means to serve as a Christian.

On Being a Believer

Christians don't necessarily serve any more generously or more skillfully than others. People who believe in God or a higher power don't necessarily behave better than non-believers, but faith does add an extra dimension to our work.

The difference might be compared to owning a bicycle. You might have a bicycle you love: it is designed for the riding you do, you like the way the bike looks, it is lightweight and portable. If the bicycle was also a final gift from a beloved grandfather who has since passed away, it takes on an added dimension. You value the bike not only for what it is and can do but also because it represents the kindness and generosity of the grandfather who bestowed it. The bike is a symbol and reminder of who your grandfather is for you.

People who engage well in service see the people they serve as important and unique. If we believe in a loving God, we also see those people as children of God. Each person is precious, regardless of how he or she looks or behaves, because God created everyone. God put them in the world for a reason. Even a child who is utterly helpless because of developmental or physical disabilities is precious in God's eyes and in our eyes as well.

On Being a Christian

What does it mean to you to be a Christian? Sometimes people equate being a Christian with being nice, as in, "That wasn't a very Christian thing to do." What we usually mean is, "That wasn't a very kind or ethical thing to do." Being a Christian has a more precise meaning; after all, people of other faiths are called to be kind and ethical, too.

To be a Christian means to be a follower of Jesus. Some people follow Jesus much as others follow Mahatma Gandhi: they consider Jesus to be a great teacher and role model, but they do not consider him to be the Son of God. You may find yourself in this category. Others follow Jesus not only because his message inspires but also because we believe he is God's Son. We not only use his words and example as a model, we believe Jesus is present in us and in those we meet.

Some people believe in Jesus, but their beliefs don't make a practical difference in their lives. If we truly are doing Christian service, our work will be affected in two primary ways: finding guidance and strength from God, and seeing God in the people we serve.

Seeing God in Others

Some people seem to easily see God in others. This is not necessarily because their faith is stronger. Some extroverts see Jesus readily in the face of others, and more introverted people may need quiet time alone to connect with God and then see God in their relationships.

A service experience is a way of stepping into a relationship with God. That may come about because you meet someone who has suffered tremendously but whose faith shines through a joyful demeanor. It may be because we are humbled by the suffering of a child and we need to turn to God to find meaning. It may happen because our hearts are opened by the work we do, and when we open our hearts we discover God is there.

“But I’m Not Sure . . .”

Adolescence is a time of questioning. Many readers of this book may be unsure about their faith. Some may not have grown up with a very strong faith. Others may have had a strong child’s faith but are in the process of reworking and moving toward a more adult relationship with God.

Doubts and questions aren’t bad, and they don’t mean we can’t operate from a Christian perspective. Doubts in a relationship with God are much like questions we have in a relationship with another human, whether a parent, a friend, a boyfriend, or a girlfriend. Having questions doesn’t mean you are not in a relationship. It simply means you are reflecting on your relationship. Growth in faith can happen in many ways. You don’t need to be sure as you start this project; you only need to be open.

Looking Ahead

You are probably having a lot of thoughts and emotions as you look ahead to your project. Most people who have done service, especially for the first time, say that their project turned out to be much different than they had anticipated. They learned things they’d never hoped to learn, discovered things about themselves that they hadn’t dreamed.

Expectations of Yourself

Take a few moments to write your expectations of yourself when you have finished your project. Give the expectations to a teacher or staff person, or set it aside to be read again in a few months. It will be interesting to compare the reality with your expectations. Use the questions below to help you envision your expectations.

- What type of service work do you envision for yourself?

(Remember, you haven’t yet made a commitment. This may change.)

- What strengths will you bring to your service?
- What part(s) of yourself will be challenged during your service?
- How will your experience change you?
- What will you like most about service?
- What are your fears?
- At the end of your work, how do you think you will feel overall about your experience?

Prayer

O Lord, you have searched me and known me.
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
 You discern my thoughts from far away.
You search out my path and my lying down,
 and are acquainted with all my ways.
Even before a word is on my tongue,
 O Lord, you know it completely.

.....

For it was you who formed my inward parts;
 You knit me together in my mother's womb.

(Psalm 139:1–4,13)

Take some quiet time. Read this passage from Psalm 139, and imagine yourself as you begin your service project. Close with this or another prayer:

God,
Thank you for the opportunity that lies before me. You know I'm feeling uncertain about where to go and how my service will turn out. Please open my heart as I choose my project, and guide me to the place that will best use my gifts. Help me find the resources I need to make a wise choice and do a good job. Thank you for your constant love and guidance.
Amen.

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The quotation on page 11 is from the January 26, 1999 address of John Paul II, “To the Young People at the Kiel Center,” Saint Louis, Missouri, at www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/travels/documents/hf_jp-ii_spe_26011999_stlouis-arrival_en.html, accessed August 30, 2005.

The prayer by Mother Teresa on pages 32–33 is from the “National Prayer Breakfast,” February 4, 1994, found at the Minneapolis Television Network Web site, www.mtn.org/tccg/documents/mt_addr.html, accessed August 30, 2005.

The quotation by Margaret Mead on page 38 is from the Institute for Intercultural Studies Web site, www.interculturalstudies.org, accessed August 30, 2005.

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The Special Olympics athlete oath on page 48 is from the Special Olympics Public Web site, www.specialolympics.org/Special+Olympics+Public+Website/default.htm, accessed August 30, 2005.

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The quotation by Pope Pius XI on page 58 is from “*Divini Redemptoris*, Encyclical of Pope Pius XI on Atheistic Communism to the Patriarchs, Primates, Archbishops, Bishops, and other Ordinaries in Peace and Communion with the Apostolic See,” at www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19031937_divini-redemptoris_en.html, accessed August 30, 2005.

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The prayer on page 92 is by Dom Helder Camara, former bishop of Recife, Brazil, August 28, 1971.

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